

research snapshot

summarize | mobilize



The link between gambling disorder, narcissism, and emotion regulation

What this research is about

Gambling disorder is a behavioral addiction involving continuous gambling. This can lead to negative consequences, such as personal and financial distress. Past research has examined the link between gambling disorder and various psychiatric disorders, including narcissistic personality disorder (NPD). Individuals with NPD are often self-centered, manipulative, and have a strong desire for others to think highly of them.

There is no consensus in research about the role of narcissism in gambling disorder. Thus, narcissistic traits may distinguish a specific subtype of addicted gamblers rather than all gamblers. Furthermore, emotion regulation may also have an impact. Emotion regulation is the ability of an individual to be aware of and be in control of his or her emotions. Past research has found that addicted gamblers often have difficulties regulating their emotions. Thus, the aim of this study was to examine the role of narcissism in patients with gambling disorder. Ability to regulate emotions was also examined in relation to narcissism and gambling disorder.

What the researchers did

The researchers recruited 74 adults with gambling disorder and 105 adults without gambling disorder. Those with gambling disorder were seeking treatment from three outpatient clinics in Latium, Italy.

Each participant completed a set of self-report questionnaires. The questionnaires assessed demographics, gambling behavior, ability to regulate emotions, and pathological narcissism. Demographics included gender, age, nationality, alcohol use, and substance use. Gambling behavior included severity

What you need to know

This study examined the association between narcissism, gambling disorder, and emotion regulation. The researchers compared between adults with and without gambling disorder. Compared to adults without gambling disorder, addicted gamblers had more difficulties regulating their emotions. They were also more likely to have grandiose narcissism. Vulnerable narcissism was not associated with gambling disorder. However, addicted gamblers who played strategic games showed higher levels of vulnerable narcissism than addicted gamblers who played non-strategic games. Emotion regulation was found to have an impact on the link between grandiose narcissism and gambling disorder. Participants with grandiose narcissism had more difficulties regulating their emotions. In turn, inability to regulate emotions led to more severe gambling problems.

of gambling disorder, frequency of gambling, and type of gambling activity. Emotion regulation was defined by traits such as impulse-control, being aware of one's emotions, and having effective strategies to deal with one's emotions.

Pathological Narcissism was assessed using the Pathological Narcissism Inventory (PNI). The PNI measures two different types of narcissism: grandiose and vulnerable. Individuals with grandiose narcissism have an inflated sense of self and believe in their superiority and uniqueness. They often have feelings of envy and aggression and lack empathy. Individuals with vulnerable narcissism often have feelings of

shame because of their ambitions and needs. They are also highly sensitive to rejection and criticism.

Comparisons were made between participants with gambling disorder (addicted gamblers) and those without the disorder (the control group).

Comparisons were also made between addicted gamblers who played strategic games and non-strategic games. Examples of strategic games included cards and sports betting. Examples of non-strategic games included lottery and slot machines.

What the researchers found

Gambling disorder was associated with grandiose narcissism and an inability to regulate emotions. That is, addicted gamblers had higher levels of grandiose narcissism than the control group. In particular, they were more likely to present themselves as being concerned with others to support a grandiose self-image. Addicted gamblers also had more difficulties regulating their emotions. Gambling disorder was not associated with vulnerable narcissism. But inability to regulate emotions was associated with both types of narcissism (grandiose and vulnerable).

Compared to addicted gamblers who played non-strategic games, those who played strategic games showed higher levels of vulnerable narcissism. Specifically, they showed higher levels of the devaluing aspect of vulnerable narcissism. This suggests that addicted gamblers involved in strategic games are prone to devalue others who do not support their need for admiration and to be ashamed of their need to be recognized by these individuals.

Emotion regulation was found to have an impact on the link between grandiose narcissism and gambling disorder. Participants with grandiose narcissism had more difficulties regulating their emotions. In turn, inability to regulate emotions led to more severe gambling problems.

How you can use this research

The findings of this study may be useful to clinicians treating gambling disorder. For example, the association between narcissism and gambling disorder suggests that clinicians may want to screen

for narcissistic traits in their clients. Therapies for gamblers with narcissistic traits could then focus on how to better regulate emotions.

Researchers could build upon this study by examining the role of other negative emotions, such as anger, in the link between gambling disorder and narcissism.

About the researchers

Guyonne Rogier is affiliated with the Department of Dynamic and Clinical Psychology at Sapienza University of Rome in Rome, Italy. **Patrizia Velotti** is affiliated with the Department of Educational Sciences at the University of Genoa in Genoa, Italy. For more information about the study, please contact Patrizia Velotti at patrizia.velotti@unige.it.

Citation

Rogier, G., & Velotti, P. (2018). Narcissistic implications in gambling disorder: The mediating role of emotion dysregulation. *Journal of Gambling Studies*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10899-018-9759-x>

Keywords

Gambling disorder, grandiose narcissism, vulnerable narcissism, emotion dysregulation

Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (GREO)

Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (GREO) has partnered with the Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University to produce Research Snapshots. GREO is an independent knowledge translation and exchange organization that aims to eliminate harm from gambling. Our goal is to support evidence-informed decision making in responsible gambling policies, standards and practices. The work we do is intended for researchers, policy makers, gambling regulators and operators, and treatment and prevention service providers.

Learn more about GREO by visiting greo.ca or emailing info@greo.ca.

